

URBANA TRAFFIC COMMISSION

Tuesday, March 14, 2017

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Michael Madigan, City Council Member, Ward 6, Chair
Craig Shonkwiler, Assistant City Engineer
Pat Connolly, Chief of Police

MEMBERS ABSENT:

None

OTHERS PRESENT:

John Collins, Operations Manager, City of Urbana
Barbara Hall, 2101 South Stonebrooke Court
Kevin Trapp, IDOT Operations Plan & Design Engineer
Gary Sims, IDOT Traffic Ops Engineer
Bill Gray, Public Works Director, City of Urbana

The meeting began at 4:00 p.m.

Approval of Minutes:

Pat Connolly moved to approve the minutes of the February 14, 2017 meeting. Craig Shonkwiler seconded the motion. The Commission voted 3-0 to approve the minutes of the February meeting.

Additions to the agenda:

There were no additions to the agenda.

Public Input

Those wishing to provide input did so at the time the item was discussed.

Unfinished Business

Item #1- Discussion of the installation of a loading zone on High Street, east of the intersection with Broadway Avenue.

John Collins discussed concerns about a food truck parking long-term along the High Street curb. He said that the vehicle parked along the south side of Lincoln Square and created a hazard for deliveries, drop-offs and two-way traffic travelling along the street. Mr. Collins recommended the installation of a loading zone so the time when the vehicle parked along the street would be defined and so the stop sign for westbound traffic would not be blocked.

Michael Madigan asked if there had been any discussion with the owner or manager of Lincoln Square regarding the recommendation.

John Collins had discussed it with Mr. Jim Webster, but he had not discussed it with the owners of Tang Dynasty.

Craig Shonkwiler said there were no parking restrictions currently posted along the street.

John Collins said that there was a stop sign to the west of the cut-in along the north side of the street.

Craig Shonkwiler moved to install a 30-minute loading zone on the north side of High Street where a cut-out is located, east of Broadway Avenue.

John Collins added that parked vehicles along the street made snow removal very difficult.

Pat Connolly seconded the motion.

The motion was approved 3-0.

This item will go to Council for consideration.

Item #2- Discussion of installation of parking restrictions on Green Street from Race Street and Lincoln Square Village.

John Collins asked if the Traffic Commission would recommend parking restrictions on Green Street between Race Street and Lincoln Square Village. Mr. Collins suggested posting the parking restriction signage on existing streetlight poles located along Green Street.

Michael Madigan asked if the section was a City street.

Mr. Collins indicated that it was a City street. He stated that when vehicles parked along the street, travel lanes were restricted.

Mr. Madigan asked if Mr. Webster had been contacted about the restrictions.

Mr. Collins indicated that he had spoken with Mr. Webster and that Mr. Webster was amenable to the restrictions.

Pat Connolly moved to restrict parking on both sides of Green Street from Race Street to the entrance of Lincoln Square Village.

Craig Shonkwiler seconded the motion.

The motion was approved 3-0.

Mr. Shonkwiler clarified that all of the street located around Lincoln Square Village were City streets to maintain.

This item will go to Council for consideration.

New Business

Item #3- Discussion of pedestrian traffic on Amber Lane between Philo Road and Myra Ridge Drive, near the Meijer's store.

Craig Shonkwiler explained that Barbara Hall submitted a Traffic Issues/Concerns Request form to City staff asking them to look at the possibility of reducing traffic speeds and installing a midblock pedestrian crosswalk near the bus stops on Amber Lane between Philo Road and Myra Ridge Drive near the Meijer store.

Ms. Hall said that she noticed many MTD passengers crossing Amber Lane. She mentioned that those who crossed had varying levels of mobility including one passenger who uses a motorized cart for transportation. In addition to the pedestrian traffic, Ms. Hall expressed concern about traffic volume and speeds. She mentioned that delivery vehicles, MTD buses, school buses, and emergency vehicles travel by the area. She felt extra warning would be helpful to caution motorists about the pedestrian crossings. She spoke with MTD drivers and said that they seemed to favor the installation of the crosswalk.

Mr. Shonkwiler thanked Ms. Hall for bringing her concerns to the attention of City staff. He reviewed the results of a speed study that was conducted on Amber Lane. He stated that the 85% speed was 34.2 miles per hour and added that it was within 5-mile-an-hour range. He explained that being within five miles of the posted speed limit was an acceptable variation. He said that there were no crashes at that location. He explained that staff typically used the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices' (MUTCD) guidelines and standards to determine traffic control. Mr. Shonkwiler said that the MUTCD did not address uncontrolled crossings similar to the crossing on Amber Lane, but that City staff used guidance on pedestrian traffic at uncontrolled crossings from metrics contained in a traffic manual used in the City of Boulder, Colorado. Using the average daily traffic (2900 per day), the pedestrian crossings and the types of pedestrians crossing (i.e. elderly, children, those with mobility issues, etc.) on Amber Lane, the Boulder traffic manual recommended the installation of a marked crosswalk and warning signage. Mr. Shonkwiler explained that the signage would be installed after winter when the weather and resources permitted later this spring.

Ms. Hall said that the number of pedestrians crossing at the bus stop might increase since the closing of County Market on Philo Road might increase the number of shoppers at the Meijer store.

Craig Shonkwiler explained that the Public Works Director has the authority to authorize the installation of the warning signage.

Mr. Shonkwiler moved to recommend to the Public Works Director to install a marked crosswalk and warning signage at the bus stops on Amber Lane between Philo Road and Myra Ridge Drive, near the Meijer store.

Pat Connolly said that it would be helpful for the Police Department to have the marked crosswalk for enforcement purposes.

Ms. Hall asked about the difference between crosswalks with white markings and crosswalks with yellow markings. She indicated that the crosswalks in the Meijer's' parking lot had yellow striping.

Mr. Shonkwiler said that the City of Urbana used white striping for its crosswalks as was recommended in the MUTCD. He added that the crosswalks within parking lots were privately maintained and the privately owned parking lots might not adhere to the MUTCD guidelines when marking their parking lots.

Chief Connolly seconded the motion.

The motion was approved 3-0.

Chief Connolly clarified that the crosswalk would be at the sidewalk ramps near the bus stop.

Mr. Shonkwiler confirmed the location.

This request will go to the Public Works Director for action.

Item #4- Discussion of IDOT speed study on University Avenue between Wright Street and Cunningham Avenue.

Craig Shonkwiler mentioned that there had been some recent pedestrian fatalities on University Avenue between Wright Street and Cunningham Avenue. He said that the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) had been asked to perform a road safety audit on the area and were now working on improvements to the corridor. He added that Mr. Craig Emberton, Plans Studies Engineer from IDOT, had requested that a speed study be performed in this area and that IDOT representatives were in attendance to discuss those results. He added that Urbana Public Works staff and IDOT staff were to meet on Friday to discuss specific details about the improvements.

Kevin Trapp, Traffic Engineer from IDOT, explained that there were four zones along the University Avenue corridor where speed studies were conducted. He stated that 35- mile-per-hour speed limit in three of the zones was supported by the speed studies, but the area between Orchard Street and Lincoln Avenue (near Carle) could be lowered to 30 miles per hour. He said that the speed limit could remain at 35 miles per hour based upon traffic speeds.

Mr. Shonkwiler mentioned that factors such as access points could be considered along with speeds when performing a speed study.

Kevin Trapp noted that the reduction of the speed limit, although seemingly easy to sign, could create some hazardous situations. Pedestrians, speeds, access points, accidents, along with other factors were considered as part of the speed study.

First, Gary Sims stated that dropping the speed limit to 30 miles per hour in one section of University Avenue would not make sense. He said that if the speed limit was to be lowered, based upon the findings for the one area, all four sections should be lowered. He noted that reducing the speed limit in all four zones would result in an approximate 70% violation rate. Second, with the high violation rate, Mr. Sims said that enforcement would be extremely difficult given the additional hazards created when pulling over vehicles to issue warnings and or tickets. So without a safe easy way to enforce the speed limit, Mr. Sims said that the signed reduction in the speed limit would not be effective. He added that IDOT did not like to reduce speed limits where a high violation rate would occur unless speed limits could be enforced.

Mr. Sims did suggest improved lighting, removal of unneeded access points, upgrade of ADA facilities and the inclusion of highly visible pedestrian crossings as solutions to reduce pedestrian/vehicular conflicts. He asked for an opinion from the Police Chief about the practicality of enforcing lower speed limits. He asked if uncontrolled pedestrian crossing could be regulated.

Chief Connolly commented that there were daily pedestrians crossing in areas where pedestrians should not be crossing.

Mr. Sims said that he noted many pedestrians jaywalking along the University Avenue corridor. He said that he noticed it near the area where student housing was located. He said that vegetation had been considered as a means to regulate uncontrolled crossings.

Chief Connolly said that having the 30-mile-an-hour speed limit in a short zone would not seem logical. He agreed that lighting and reduced pedestrian crossings would reduce conflicts.

Mr. Sims stated that IDOT had received a request for an uncontrolled crossing between Goodwin Avenue and Mathews Avenue. He said that the area was close to a protected crossing, so it was safer to direct pedestrian traffic to that location instead of at an uncontrolled crossing.

Craig Shonkwiler asked how a reduced speed limit would impact traffic signals in moving traffic along University Avenue. He noted that it would be easier to drive 30 miles per hour going westbound, but 35 miles per hour would be easier going eastbound, especially since traffic speeds east of Cunningham Avenue increased to 40 miles per hour.

Michael Madigan said that 40 miles per hour in the section to the east of Cunningham Avenue seemed appropriate.

Mr. Sims said that he spoke with David Burkybile, IDOT Traffic Signals Traffic Engineer, who was responsible for the signal programming on IDOT roadways. According to Mr. Sims, traffic signals were programmed at the speed of 34 miles per hour for the area near Coler Street traffic and it reached 37 miles per hour for the other three sections of roadway. He added that some state routes, such as Neil Street in Champaign, can be programmed for morning inbound traffic and evening outbound traffic, but University Avenue traffic volumes do not have a typical morning inbound/evening outbound traffic pattern, which made programming the traffic signals difficult.

Mr. Shonkwiler asked if there were other communities that tried to force speeds down and what were the results. In particular, he asked if there were incidents of higher violations or problems in adjacent areas.

Kevin Trapp stated that speed limits were reduced on Route 47, north of Mahomet, for a bicycle/pedestrian path that crossed the roadway. He said that the speed reduction was not warranted, but there were no problems in adjacent areas. IDOT said that enforcement was necessary to reduce speeds.

Chief Connolly said that the Police Department deliberately enforced cell phone violations on University Avenue on a daily basis. He expressed concern about lowering speeds in just one small area of University Avenue. He said that if it were to be changed, the entire stretch would need to be reduced. He wondered what the violation rate was in Champaign.

Mr. Shonkwiler stated that one would have to travel a distance into Champaign before a 30-mile-an-hour sign could be seen.

Mr. Sims was concerned that if there were many violators, pedestrians would think that vehicles were travelling slower than they actually were and as a result the pedestrians might think that they had more time to cross the roadway. He said that it was easy to observe traffic travelling at slow speeds, but he wasn't sure that pedestrians would be able to judge safe crossing gaps.

Mr. Shonkwiler stated that lower speeds would require lower stopping distances, but motorists may not drive at the posted speed limit if they do not feel uncomfortable driving at a faster speed. He noted that in the University District of Urbana (the area bounded by Lincoln Avenue, Wright Street, Florida Avenue), speed limits were 25 miles per hour and motorists seeing large numbers of pedestrians would lower their speeds as a result. He said that compliance was easier if motorists knew why the speed limit was lower.

Bill Gray asked if IDOT personnel could change the traffic signal coordination to slow traffic to 30 miles per hour. He was not sure that the traffic signals should be used to change behavior.

Mr. Sims mentioned that he had discussed coordination changes with Mr. Burkybile. He said that Mr. Burkybile stated that the current settings fit the current traffic patterns.

Chief Connolly asked if activating the pedestrian button impacted the signal coordination.

Mr. Sims said that if the button was activated, it would allow a longer cycle and then adjust back to the regular cycle over time.

Chief Connolly asked if that posting a lower speed would not necessarily slow drivers.

Mr. Shonkwiler, Mr. Sims, and Mr. Trapp concurred that from their engineering experience signage alone does not usually result in lower vehicle speeds.

Mr. Trapp said that changes in the roadway or enforcement can change drivers' habits.

Mr. Sims said that they have found that to be the case in all situations.

Mr. Shonkwiler referred to travel on Windsor Road, west of Lincoln Avenue, as an example of motorists travelling faster than the posted speed since motorists felt safe driving faster than the posted 45 miles per hour.

Chief Connolly also mentioned that it would be harder to enforce if the violations were slightly higher than the posted speeds. He said that they could only issue warnings since the speeds would not be significant enough to ticket.

Mr. Sims said that the hazard created by pulling the motorist over would create as much problem as would travelling at the higher speed since the pulled over traffic would restrict travel lanes.

Chief Connolly said that officers tried to direct motorists to pull onto a side street or into a parking lot, but some motorists stopped on University Avenue if flagged by officers. He was very concerned about pedestrian traffic on University Avenue and the difficulty that motorists have had seeing pedestrians who crossed at random locations along the corridor.

Gary Sims said that if the area were to be signed with the signal coordinated for 30 miles per hour without enforcement, motorists would probably have more stops and with that, more incidents of running red lights and rear-end collisions.

Craig Shonkwiler mentioned that the lowered speed limit might have unintended consequences.

Bill Gray suggested that perhaps the lower speed would reduce the severity of pedestrians' injuries when involved in vehicular crashes.

Gary Sims was concerned about motorists running red lights, especially for motorists who were familiar with the corridor who assumed they knew the timing of signals.

Mr. Gray asked if lane width reduction would be possible.

Kevin Trapp said that lane reduction had been proven to work in reducing speeds.

Mr. Sims said that he would defer recommendations about lane widths until Urbana Public Works staff meet with IDOT on Friday. He mentioned that IDOT was looking at an eight-foot sidewalk along both sides of University Avenue where practical.

Mr. Gray said that some of the pedestrian crashes were at night so the improved lighting would be helpful. He noted that the streetlight poles were mostly located on the south side of University Avenue. He mentioned that the newer lighting technology has virtually eliminated dark spots between lights.

Mr. Sims said that LED lighting was included in the scope and that IDOT was looking at some options.

Mr. Gray commented that the 5-Points intersection was extremely wide and might require lighting on both sides of the roadway.

Chief Connolly said that he had noticed an increase in pedestrian traffic at the 5-Points intersection, especially on the east side of the intersection, with the addition of Walgreens nearby.

Craig Shonkwiler stated that with Campus Circle located on University Avenue, there had been an increase in students along University Avenue. He recommended that the record show the discussion and that further action be continued with IDOT representatives on Friday.

Mr. Sims said that being close to the University of Illinois behaviors were difficult to teach since there was a high turn-over rate in the population.

Mr. Gray said that, in general, rental properties had high turn-over. He stated that the intent of transportation plan for the University of Illinois was to make a conscious effort to move vehicular traffic away from Green Street to streets such as University Avenue. He said that motorists in a hurry to go across town use University Avenue instead of travelling on Green Street or Springfield Avenue.

Mr. Sims said that he had no preference with the speed limit for the corridor. He thought that enforcement would be difficult.

Mr. Gray mentioned that the City Council had embraced the concepts of Vision Zero, which has a goal of zero traffic fatalities through education, design and enforcement.

Mr. Trapp mentioned that the State of Illinois was a Vision Zero state.

Barbara Hall said that she was surprised by the number of bicyclists on Broadway Avenue. She was concerned that there were some that were riding without helmets and travelling the wrong direction. She felt the type of cyclist in the area was different that the type found on campus.

Mr. Sims said that the inclusion of an 8-foot wide sidewalk that could be used by bicyclists on University Avenue was part of the proposed plan. He mentioned that bicycle advocates said that people would use facilities if installed on University Avenue.

Mr. Shonkwiler said that the presence of pedestrians and bicyclists might be a reason for reducing the speed limit on University Avenue to 30 miles per hour. He also noted that the average daily traffic (ADT) on University Avenue was comparable to the volume on the interstate so it would be a balancing act to try to provide a safe roadway for competing users. Mr. Shonkwiler thanked the IDOT representatives for their discussion.

With no other business at hand, the meeting was adjourned at 4:58 p.m.

The next regularly scheduled Traffic Commission meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, April 11, 2017, at 4:00 p.m. at the Urbana Public Works Department, 706 Glover Avenue, second floor conference room.

Respectfully submitted,
Barbara Stiehl
Recording Secretary